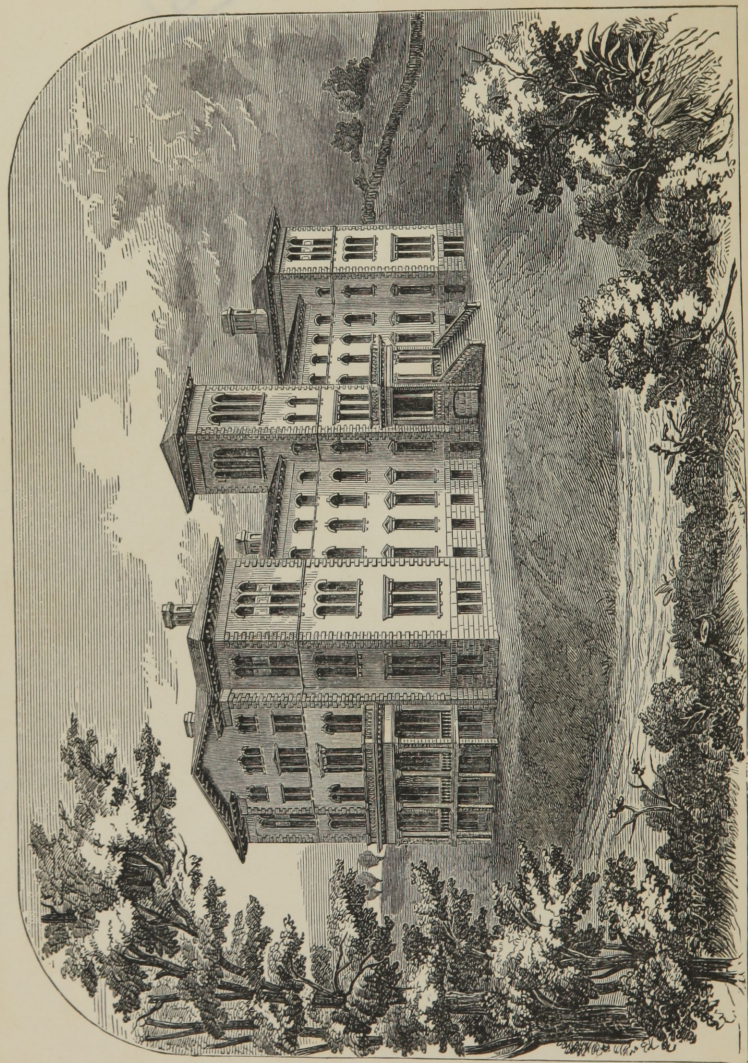


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1854

New York Asylum for Idiots.







W. L. WOOLLETT, Jr., Architect.

ASYLUM FOR IDIOTS.

ACCOUNT OF THE CEREMONIES

AT THE

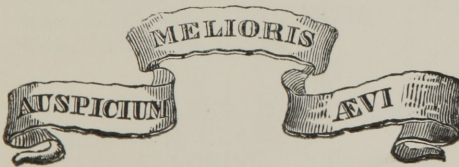
LAYING OF THE CORNER-STONE

OF THE

NEW YORK ASYLUM FOR IDIOTS,

AT

SYRACUSE, SEPT. 8, 1854.



ALBANY:

J. MUNSELL, 78 STATE STREET,

1854.

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MISS ELIZA A. LORING, } TEACHERS,
MISS SARAH P. YOUNG, }
MISS ALVIRA WOOD, MATRON,
MR. J. C. DIXON, ASSISTANT.

Description of the Grounds and Building.

BY THE ARCHITECT.

The Grounds.

The grounds upon which the New York Asylum for Idiots is to be erected are situated a little more than a mile from the center of Syracuse, in a southwesterly direction. They include a territory of eighteen acres, and were purchased for the use of the asylum mainly through the liberality of the citizens of Syracuse.

The western and highest portion of the grounds is wood land. The remainder descending with a fine slope to the southeast, terminates in a terrace of about four acres in extent, upon which the building is located.

This site is an elevated one, being sixty feet above the general level of the plain upon which the city of Syracuse is built, and fifty feet above the public road; which ascent is overcome in the approach to the building by an easy road, winding round the base of the terrace. This road is formed mainly by the rock excavated from the foundations of the building. The position affords a fine view of the city of Syracuse, Salina, Liverpool, Lake Onondaga, the Central and Binghamton Rail Roads, for some distance, and the village of Geddes.

Supply of Water.

The present supply of water at the building is abundant, although a time of unprecedented drought. It consists of water collected from various springs on the hillside, on the south line of lot, and is elevated to the site of the building by a hydraulic ram. The other and more abundant sup-

ply is from a well sunk in the rock, at the north end of the sub-cellar of the building; this was obtained by boring to a depth of twenty-two feet, and the supply bids fair to be inexhaustible. Other borings have been made upon the premises with like results. Water can be obtained from the public water works of Syracuse, if required.

Materials of the Building.

The external walls of basement and sub-cellar are of limestone laid in cement; the basement faced with freestone ashlar; all the division walls are of brick; all the outer walls of the superstructure, sixteen inches thick; the hall walls up to the third story floor, sixteen inches in thickness, and from them up to the roof, twelve inches in thickness; those portions of the walls sustaining great weight, laid in cement; the outer walls are built solid, and will be furred, lathed, and plastered. The plastering will be finished to grounds, and will be three coat work; that of the corridors will be "floated work;" all other parts, "hard finished." The floors of the principal parts of the building will be double, the upper floor of Georgia pine battens. Three flights of stairs, extending the whole height of the building, in addition to the private stairs to the superintendent's apartments. The main stairs in the center of the building will be of iron, supported by brick walls, on all sides. The roofs covered with tin; all vallies and gutters of copper. The cut stone used upon the building is from the quarries at Fulton, Oswego county.

Drains.

The drains are sixteen inches in diameter, built of hard brick and cement, and of a sufficient depth to take the water from the bottom of the sub-cellar. All the waste water will be conveyed to the main drain, which will discharge the same to the south line of lot, at a point where it can be no annoyance to the building.

Heating and Ventilation.

The heating will be done by six of Chilson's hot-air furnaces, placed in the sub-cellar excavated for that purpose in the rock; all the hot-air pipes are made of tin, and built in the brick walls, in every case, and registers placed remote from wood work. The floors over the furnace rooms to be fire-proof. The ventilation of the apartments will be secured by ventiducts made of wood, and built in the walls, and made to terminate in the main ventilators on the roofs. The upward current in these ventiducts will be secured by a *gas* burner or steam pipe in each of the ventilators.

Lighting.

The whole of the building will be lighted with gas, and if made on the premises, it will be in a detached building for that purpose.

Description of the Building.

The edifice designed to be occupied for the institution is exhibited in the accompanying view, as seen from the south-east. The building is one hundred and fifty-three feet front and rear; the ends or wings, seventy feet from front to rear; the central parts, fifty feet deep; the tower eighteen feet square, and carried to the height of seventy feet. In elevation, the wings embrace four stories, basement and sub-cellar—the central parts three stories, and the tower five stories. The central parts recede ten feet from the front of the wings, and eight feet from the face of the tower, forming recesses on each side of the same; like recesses obtain in the rear, or western elevation, of the building, the first and second stories of which are enclosed with glass, forming large piazzas in the rear of the school rooms and the principal dormitories of the second story, and made so as to form a part of those apartments, by the windows which extend to the floor.

The building is in the Italian style, with superstructure of pressed brick, painted and sanded in harmony with the brown freestone dressings, supported by a rusticated ashlar basement. All the external angles are enriched with quoin blocks, with beveled rustic on each. All the external windows and doors have dressings of stone, with string courses of the same materials. The fenestral decorations embrace quite a variety. Those of the principal story in front have pediment heads, supported by moulded trusses. Three bayed windows in the front of wings. Those in the recessed parts of the second story have semicircular heads. Those of the third story, segment heads—all of freestone. Those on the ends of the building embrace various forms, all in harmony with those in the front. The principal entrance in front at the base of the tower is approached by a flight of twelve steps, eighteen feet in length, the platform of which will be covered with a rusticated portico. The entrance at the south end will be under a *porte cochere*; that at the north, by steps of cut stone. The entire building will be surmounted by large projecting medallion cornices.

Description of Plans.

The sub-cellar contains a hall eight feet wide, extending the whole length of the building, with areas at each end, open at the top. This hall communicates with the six furnace rooms, each twelve feet square. These, with ample room for the storage of fuel, comprise all the apartments of the sub-cellar. This part of the building is so arranged that the heating can be by hot *water* or *steam*, if found desirable to introduce either of them at any future day. This story is nine feet high in the clear.

The basement is nine feet high in the clear, and comprises the kitchen and four dining rooms in the rear, washing, ironing and bathing rooms, servants' hall and house dining room, with cellars, store rooms and pantries, together with superintendent's dining room, &c. This part of the

building is made accessible from the upper part by stairs at each end, and from without by the doors at the north and south ends of the building.

The principal story is fourteen feet high in the clear, and is arranged with corridor through the center of the building, eight feet in width, with stairs at each end for boys and girls respectively, and the main stairs in the center of the building. The rear is occupied by the north, south and center school rooms, all of which are made to communicate by folding doors; and these, again, are made accessible to the enclosed piazzas in the rear. The front on the south of the tower is occupied by the superintendent's parlor, study and private stairs, on the north of the principal entrance, the reception room, office and teachers' sitting room. The *north* and *south* wings contain the day rooms, sitting rooms and nurseries for the children.

The second story is eleven feet high in the clear, the corridor same as that of the principal story. The front part between the tower and the south wing contains the superintendent's apartments. All the other parts of the south half of the building will be used for dormitories, &c., for girls. The north half of the building contains the dormitories, &c., for the boys—the teachers' apartments being in the front, on the north side of tower. The rear dormitories communicate with the enclosed piazzas of the second story.

The third story is nine feet high in the clear, and is divided and subdivided similar to the second story. The access to the upper section of the tower is by an enclosed stairs from this floor. The room on this floor in the tower to be used as a museum. The fourth story is nine feet high in the clear, and is confined to the wings, which contain two dormitories each.

The upper section of the tower is furnished with a gallery

from which point an extended view of the surrounding country may be obtained.

The gymnasium will be in a detached building, thirty-five feet by sixty feet, and approached by a covered way from the schoolrooms.

Buildings for industrial occupations will be added, as circumstances may require.

New York Asylum for Idiots.

The Corner-Stone was Laid
ON THE
EIGHTH DAY OF SEPTEMBER,
1854.

Trustees.

Hon. John C. Spencer,
Hon. James H. Titus,
Hon. Franklin Townsend,
Henry N. Pohlman, D. D.,
Frederick F. Backus, M. D.

Ex-Officio Trustees.

Hon. Horatio Seymour,
Hon. S. E. Church,
Hon. E. W. Leavenworth,
Hon. James M. Cook.

Superintendent.

Hervey B. Wilbur, M. D.

Architect.

William L. Woollett, Jr.

Builders.

John Bridgford,	James Christie,
<i>Mason.</i>	<i>Carpenter.</i>

NOTE.—This is the form of the tablet in the principal entrance.

Articles Deposited in the Corner-Stone.

1st.—Reports of Dr. Backus to the senate in 1846 and 1847, upon the education of idiots.

2d.—The report of the State Lunatic Asylum for 1846, recommending the establishment of an asylum for idiots.

3d.—Reports of the trustees of the New York Idiot Asylum, for 1852, '53, '54.

4th.—Legislative manual.

5th.—Syracuse city charter, &c., with a list of the present officers of the city government.

6th.—Copies of the Syracuse daily papers.

7th.—The names of the donors for the site of the Institution.

8th.—The programme of the proceedings of the day.

Order of Exercises
ON
LAYING THE CORNER-STONE
OF THE
New York State Asylum for Idiots,
AT
Syracuse, September 8, 1854.

1. Music by the band.
2. Prayer by Rev. Dr. Pohlman, of Albany.
3. Hymn.
4. Laying of the Corner-Stone, and Address by Gov. Seymour.
5. Address by Dr. Wilbur, superintendent.
6. Hymn.
7. Address by Gov. Hunt.
8. Hymn.
9. Addresses by Dr. Seguin, of France, and other gentlemen.
10. Benediction, by Rev. Mr. Canfield.

Laying of the Corner-Stone.

The following account of this ceremony is substantially taken from the *Syracuse Daily Journal*, of Sept. 9th, 1854.

A large concourse of citizens and strangers assembled to witness the laying of the corner-stone of the State Idiot Asylum in this city, yesterday at 11 o'clock.

At an early hour carriages might have been seen wending their way in the direction which leads to the institution. The site is located about a mile from the central part of the city, and is situated on a beautiful eminence, about sixty feet above the level of the valley. The trustees of the institution, the mayor and common council of the city in a body, were present, together with several distinguished gentlemen from abroad.

The exercises on the ground were commenced with music by a band provided for the occasion.

In the absence of Dr. Pohlman, of Albany, who was detained by sickness, prayer was offered by Rev. William B. Ashley, of Syracuse.

The following hymn, altered by Rev. Samuel J. May, for the occasion, was then sung:

Far from us suppliants, God of grace,
Th' unfeeling heart remove:
O! form in our obedient souls,
The image of thy love.

O, may our sympathizing breasts
The generous pleasure know,
Kindly to share in others' joy,
And weep for others' woe.

Where the most helpless sons of grief
 In low distress are laid,
 Soft be our hearts their pains to feel,
 And strong our hands to aid.
 O, be the law of love fulfilled
 In every act and thought;
 Each scornful feeling be removed,
 Each selfish view forgot.

His excellency, Gov. Seymour, who was to have laid the corner-stone and made the opening address, being prevented by illness from attendance, that duty devolved upon his honor, the mayor of the city, Allen Monroe, Esq.

A metallic box, containing the articles enumerated on a previous page, was deposited in the cavity prepared for the purpose, and the stone laid with appropriate remarks and the usual ceremonies.

Dr. Wilbur, superintendent of the institution, then made the following address:

The history of the New York Asylum for Idiots, for the accommodation of which this building is now to be erected, is contained in the annual reports that have been made to the legislature by the board of trustees. I have, however, been requested to prepare a concise statement of the main facts in its history, to be read on this occasion.

The first attempt, in this country, to found a state institution for idiots was made in New York in the year 1846.* Only a week after the meeting of the legislature, the Hon. Frederick F. Backus, of Rochester, then a member of the senate took the first steps to secure legislation in behalf of idiots. He moved that that portion of the last previous state census which related to the number and condition of idiots, he referred to the committee on medical societies.

Shortly after, as chairman of that committee, he made a long and able report. It contained a statement of the probable number of idiots in the state. It alluded to the generally prevailing opinion that "any efforts for their improvement were of a perfectly hopeless character—an opinion so prevalent that even benevolent men, in search of objects of commiseration and charity, had passed them by;" it described their condition, thus neglected and forsaken, as "having been almost

* See Appendix.

turned adrift like cattle" and of their being regarded "as incapable of instruction as the brutes that perish." But it then affirmed that these views so long entertained were mistaken ones. That the idiot could be educated. That those who were now left by neglect under the control of their animal natures, could be redeemed and rendered capable of speech, of self-control, of simple school studies, and of labor and various industrial occupations.

In confirmation of these assertions it gave a brief history of the European schools for idiots; the proofs of the very favorable and practical results of those schools, as furnished by the testimony of scientific men of extensive reputation in Europe and America. It furnished the opinions of well known superintendents of insane asylums, that asylums for idiots were a want of the age, from the number, present condition and undoubted susceptibility of instruction of the class in question.

During this same session, the late Dr. Brigham, in the annual report of the State Lunatic Asylum, dated Nov. 30th, 1845, gave a synoptical statement of the number of insane and idiotic persons in the state. He reported the success of the European institutions for idiots, and ended by expressing the hope that New York would, sooner or later, provide an asylum for their especial improvement.

After a proper interval Dr. Backus introduced a bill for the establishment of an asylum for idiots, which finally passed the senate by a vote of 11 to 10. This bill found a ready champion in the Assembly, in the person of Mr. Titus, and though it was first concurred in, was finally rejected by a vote of 58 to 47—not because there was a want of conviction in the minds of the members of the necessity of such an institution in the state, but because the appropriation necessary for the requisite buildings, was deemed incompatible with the resolutions of retrenchment in state expenditures adopted by the party then controlling the legislature.

During the interval between the session of 1846 and the one succeeding, Dr. Backus pushed his labors with unwearied zeal. He collected additional testimony from various sources to be embodied in a second report, which was made in the senate Feb. 16th, 1847. At his suggestion, also, memorials were prepared and presented to that body by the State Medical Society and other associations.

In 1847 a bill establishing an asylum for idiots and making an appropriation for the erection of a suitable building, passed the senate by a vote of 17 to 7. This was finally lost in the house by the want of time at the close of the adjourned session.

I have dwelt thus long upon the labors of Dr. Backus, because, though not successful in accomplishing the special legislation or immediate results which they were designed to accomplish, they were by no means fruitless. They prepared the way by a convincing array of facts and the warm expression of faith in the proposed enterprise, for the later and more successful attempts at legislation; and because the time for such acknowledgment seems not inappropriate when we witness the beginning of the realization of the hope he then earnestly expressed, that the measure he advocated would find favor with the legislature, "that the heart of many an afflicted parent within our borders might be gladdened with the thought that soon there should be an institution where he could safely place his poor stricken child, with the encouraging hope that he might in some measure be restored in mind, with acquired habits of cleanliness, industry, and a disposition to advance in knowledge and in some useful occupation, and become, although a weak and humble one, a constituent, social member of the human family around him."

To continue the history, I will mention that Gov. Fish recommended the subject to the consideration of the legislature in both of his annual messages. But as there was no one in either branch of the legislature who felt any particular interest in the subject and who would continually urge it upon their attention, no action resulted from the recommendation. I will now notice briefly the history of the legislation to establish our asylum.

In the first message of Gov. Hunt, the attention of the legislature was again called to the subject, and the recommendation was renewed that an institution should be established for the benefit of this long-neglected class.

Not resting with the mere mention of the subject in his message, he exerted himself personally to accomplish so desirable a purpose. He invited Dr. Howe, superintendent of the Massachusetts Blind Asylum, under whose supervision an experimental school for idiots had been already established there, to visit Albany and give an exhibition of the results of training and teaching in the case of some of the pupils then under his charge.

This had its desired effect. The sympathies of the members of both branches of the legislature were warmly enlisted, and an act was passed at the adjourned session, establishing an asylum for idiots, with a sufficient appropriation for its existence for two years. Trustees were appointed by the governor whose names were a sufficient guarantee that the experiment would be fairly tried, and whose

opinions as to the result of the experiment would have a controlling influence upon the action of future legislatures. Providentially a very excellent building for the temporary accommodation of the asylum was at once obtained, in the vicinity of Albany, and no delay was experienced in the reception of pupils.

In less than a year from the first appropriation—at the session of 1852—the number of state pupils in the experimental school, was increased to 30.

At the session of 1853, a still more decisive test of the confidence the new institution had inspired in the public mind, of the practicability of the work for which it was designed, was given. A bill was passed making an appropriation not only for its continuance in its present form, but for the erection of suitable buildings for its accommodation, thus placing it upon the same footing with the other state charitable institutions.

Steps were immediately taken by the trustees to carry out the design of the legislature. It was soon found, however, that the provision made was not adequate to accomplish all that was deemed desirable in the matter of building and grounds, and they very wisely decided to defer all action, beyond the purchase of a site, the preparation of plans for building, and conditional contracts based upon those plans, till the meeting of the next legislature.

The whole subject was fairly stated in the last annual report of the trustees to that body, and their consideration and action, as, in some sense, *ex-officio* guardians of the asylum, solicited. This candid reference of the question to their decision was very favorably received. An additional appropriation was granted with the privilege of building according to the plans submitted to them.

Immediately on the adjournment of the last legislature, a meeting of the trustees was held, when it was decided—in view of the fact that some exceptions had been taken to the site already purchased, and also of some feeling that had prevailed and been expressed in the legislature, that the asylum should be located elsewhere than in Albany—it was decided to review the whole subject of location before commencing the new building.

While this was pending, an overture was received from some of the citizens of Syracuse of a gift of a suitable location in the vicinity of that city.

This proposal was finally accepted after an examination of the sites in the neighborhood of Syracuse by a committee of the trustees. A later and more thorough examination and comparison of the various

sites that could be obtained, resulted in the selection of the spot upon which we have assembled to-day.

The conditional contracts of last year have accordingly been perfected. A building of the same form and materials—to be built by the same mechanics, upon as favorable terms, and by the same architect—as the one proposed to be erected last year in Albany, is now here commenced.

In this brief record of the history of our asylum, I can not forbear, in justice to my own feelings—and I know what I am about to say will meet with the approval of the members of the board of trustees—I can not forbear to express my sense of the great indebtedness of the institution for its present position, in point of usefulness and in public estimation, to the labors of one man, who, although prevented by a serious illness in a neighboring state from being present and participating in the ceremonies of this occasion is, I doubt not, yet present with us in spirit. I mean the Hon. John C. Spencer, who as chairman of the executive committee of the board of trustees, has borne the greatest share of the labor necessary for the well-management and prosperity of the institution—who has ever been ready to sustain the courage and strengthen the hands of the superintendent by his constant sympathy and counsel—and who has been gracefully crowning the latter portion of a life of indefatigable intellectual exertions by an equally untiring devotion to the interests of this and kindred objects of charity and philanthropy.

Then followed a hymn adapted to the occasion by Rev. Mr. May:

Bright source of everlasting love,
 To Thee our souls we raise,
 And to Thy sovereign goodness rear
 This monument of praise.
 Thy mercy gilds the path of life,
 With every cheering ray,
 And kindly checks the rising tear,
 Or wipes that tear away.
 What shall we render, bounteous Lord,
 For all the grace we see?
 Each wise design, each generous deed,
 Proceedeth, Lord, from Thee.
 To Thee we owe the gracious plan
 That bids these walls arise,
 To Thee we look in earnest prayer,
 To bless this enterprise.

Ex-Gov. Washington Hunt was then introduced, and delivered the following address:

The foundation of an establishment for the relief of human suffering and infirmity, is an event which never fails to fill the generous mind with unalloyed satisfaction. This is especially true in regard to institutions intended to mitigate the deprivation of the senses and faculties which are necessary to the full enjoyment of intellectual life. Besides the inherent and direct blessings which flow from an enlightened system of public charity, we contemplate each new effort to alleviate the calamities of mankind, as an onward step in civilization and social happiness. The people of New York, thus far in their historic career, have been honorably distinguished for the philanthropic spirit which has animated and guided their legislative policy. Even in the turbulence of party strife, when a calm spectator would conclude that the kindest sentiments of our nature were stifled by the violence of political controversy, the mild voice of humanity, speaking to the conscience in behalf of the unfortunate, has been heard and respected. The varied institutions of New York, designed for the moral and intellectual advancement of her children, while regarded with a just state pride by her citizens, have been deemed worthy of imitation by many of our sister states, and our progress in some departments of social and political amelioration has elicited the highest encomiums from the statesmen and the philanthropists of Europe. Thus far our people have been actuated by a just estimate of the design and office of political institutions. They have recognized those high obligations which are inseparable from free government, constituting the only security for its permanence. The administration of justice, which in its broader sense may be said to include as well the making as the execution of laws to control mankind in their relations to society and to each other, is undoubtedly the primary and most essential function of government. The experience of all countries and of every age, attests the necessity for an agency competent to punish the guilty and to uphold the weak against the strong; and this necessity is justly regarded as the origin of the social compact. But the responsibilities of a state are not confined within these narrow limits. When the civil power has provided for the protection of person and property, by equal laws honestly administered, the fulfillment of this duty seems but to open the way for the performance of other duties of vital importance to the happiness of society. The estab-

lishment of justice and security is the first care of an enlightened commonwealth; but patriotism and wise statesmanship find new fields for exertion. They are exhibited in efforts for improving the physical advantages of the country, and elevating its moral condition. I will not dwell upon the manifold blessings which proceed from judicious legislation in favor of trade, intercourse, manufacturing arts, and the development of those varied resources which form the basis of our material prosperity. It is more appropriate, on an occasion like the present, to turn our view to that bright page of our history which records the constant advance of the state in works of beneficence intended for the diffusion of knowledge, virtue and religion. It is more pleasing to contemplate those noble triumphs of mercy and humanity which shed abroad the pure light of science and morality, imparting wisdom to the simple, consolation to the afflicted, and proclaiming to all "peace on earth and good will towards men."

Let us indulge a brief retrospect of the moral progress which illustrates the annals of New York. We have created schools for the education of all our people, so that in future no child of poverty or adversity will have cause to plead ignorance as a defence for vice or crime. Our system of popular instruction establishes the fabric of republican liberty on the sure basis of public virtue and intelligence. Not satisfied with the adoption of general systems which provide for the intellectual needs of the mass of the community, the humane spirit of our legislation has sought out for relief those special classes of our fellow beings whom unkind fortune, or the mysterious decrees of an all wise Creator have separated, in some degree, from a participation in the common felicity. In every county a home has been provided for the destitute; in our cities asylums have been reared for the needy orphan; hospitals for the sick and infirm have been liberally endowed by the legislature; houses of refuge have been established for the training and reformation of youthful offenders, by which hundreds have been rescued from the evil influences which surrounded their childhood; and even in the punishment of felons, we have strived to rouse them to a love of virtue by the teachings of benevolence and religion. Our institutions for the insane, the blind, the deaf and dumb, stand conspicuous among the best achievements of civilization and humanity. A candid observation of the philanthropic agencies introduced or patronized by the state seemed to justify an impression that little or nothing was wanting to complete our system of public charities.

It was generally assumed that no field for the exercise of practical benevolence remained wholly unoccupied. The legislature had evinced an effective sympathy for every form of suffering humanity which was believed to come within the scope of legislative action. Yet there remained a class of unfortunates, the most wretched and helpless of our fellow beings, for whose relief no effort had been made, because all effort was deemed impracticable and hopeless.

The idiot naturally excites feelings of compassion, saddened by the painful reflection that his forlorn condition admits of no essential improvement. Though created in the human form, he appears at first to be destitute of all the moral and intellectual attributes which distinguish man from "the brute that perisheth"—and in most cases this degradation is aggravated by a degree of physical incapacity which renders him more impotent, in respect to his wants, than the lower grade of animals. The divine gift of reason, with which our Heavenly Father endowed the race of immortals whom he created in his own image, was formerly believed to be absolutely withheld from the ordinary subject of idiocy. His life was perceived to be a burden to himself and to others. Alike insensible to kindness or reproof, maternal affection was lavished in vain upon the idiot child. As advancing years increase his stature and strength, he is often an object of dread or disgust, and his repulsive presence becomes a source of daily humiliation and unavailing tears. Sorrowing parents and kindred contemplate his misery with agonizing despair. Can we consider it strange then, that until a recent period, the idiotic should have been treated as victims of an inexorable destiny, doomed to a state of debasement too profound to admit of amelioration.

How difficult was it for many of us to be persuaded that their condition was susceptible of moral or mental improvement! With what emotions of gratitude and admiration ought we to regard the generous benefactors who have rescued this class of beings from their degradation, bringing them from darkness to light, and awakening into new existence, the living soul which seemed to be lost in interminable night.

It was reserved for modern philanthropy to discover that the idiot is not beyond the reach of benevolence, and to demonstrate by actual result that he retains some latent germs of intellect which may be developed by patient culture, and that a large portion of this class of sufferers may be subjected to healthful discipline, employed in useful labor and raised to a condition of comparative intelligence and comfort.

Only a few years have elapsed since the first schools for the instruction and training of idiots were instituted in Europe. The success of the experiment in France soon induced other nations to follow their example. It has been truly said that to an eminent citizen of our own state belongs the high honor of being the first American legislator to advocate the claims of the idiot and initiate measures for his relief. Frederick F. Backus, then a member of the New York senate, was the first to bring forward a bill providing for the erection of a state asylum for that purpose.

My own feelings, seconded by a sense of personal justice and a proper regard for truth of history, prompt me to this public acknowledgment of his claims upon our gratitude; and I can not permit the occasion to pass without congratulating him on the success which now rewards his labors in this work of humanity. "Peace hath her victories"—and according to my estimate of worldly renown, the triumph which crowns his philanthropic efforts is more truly glorious, than the victories by which countries have been desolated, and the happiness of mankind sacrificed upon the altar of national pride or personal ambition.

In reviewing the progress of legislation on this interesting subject, we must award a prominent position to Massachusetts—always among the foremost in wise measures for elevating the condition of the human race. Almost simultaneous with the first movement of Dr. Backus in our senate, the subject was brought before the Massachusetts legislature, and commissioners were appointed to investigate the number and condition of idiots in that state. The result of their investigations was presented in two annual reports of great value and interest. The facts and recommendations submitted by the commissioners induced the legislature of Massachusetts in 1848 to appropriate \$2500 per annum for three years to aid an experimental school for idiots, which was established at the Asylum for the Blind in South Boston, under the superintendence of Dr. S. G. Howe, whose generous efforts in the cause, before and since that period, are deserving of our grateful acknowledgments. The success of the experimental school at South Boston, was highly satisfactory; and in 1850 it was made a permanent institution with a standing appropriation of \$5000 per annum for its support. Thus it will be seen that while New York is the first to erect a state establishment as an asylum for idiots, Massachusetts was the first to appropriate money to test their capacity for instruction. The delay in our own state was not the result of indifference; but may be attributed to the

distrust and incredulity with which new systems, conflicting with settled opinions, are sometimes received. Although the subject was urged upon the attention of the legislature from year to year, no definite action was reached until the special session of 1851, and it is but candid to confess that many of the members who finally consented to the experiment, expressed serious doubts of its success. The belief so generally entertained that a class of beings apparently destitute of the perceptive and reasoning faculties are incapable of practical improvement was deeply rooted in many intelligent minds.

The fact that so large a portion of the legislature yielded adverse opinions, and united with cordiality in the measure finally adopted, is honorable to their patriotism and liberality. The act of 1851 was viewed as an experiment by many who voted for it, and it was deemed advisable that the means employed for testing it should be reduced to the most moderate scale.

Accordingly, the first appropriation was limited to \$6000 per annum for two years. It may safely be affirmed that results so important and satisfactory have seldom been produced by so small an expenditure of the public resources. The experience of a single year was sufficient to dispel all doubts, and to awaken the public mind to a just sense of duty towards the afflicted class whose claims have been too long neglected. The anticipations of the most ardent friends of the measure were fully realized if not surpassed. Convinced by demonstration of the success of the undertaking, each successive legislature has evinced a readiness to make ample provision for the support of the asylum, and to place it upon a permanent footing, among the most favored of our charitable institutions.

After the history which has just been given of the progress of the institution, I do not deem it necessary on this occasion to present a further statement on that subject, or to enlarge on the nature and advantages of the means of instruction which have been so effectually employed. Further information on these topics may be found in the annual reports of the trustees and the superintendent. The facts exhibited in these periodical statements are peculiarly gratifying. They are sufficient to carry conviction to all candid minds. I trust it will not be deemed inappropriate if I embrace this opportunity to express my appreciation of the disinterested zeal, fidelity and capacity with which the trustees have carried forward the work committed to their hands. They have discharged a difficult duty with a degree of energy alike worthy of praise and imi-

tation. Their reward is expressed in that benignant precept of antiquity, "the more we live for others, the more we live for ourselves."

Gov. Hunt said he felt some diffidence in expressing the obligations so eminently due to the superintendent of the asylum for idiots. It is always difficult to speak of a public benefactor in his own presence; and if he were now to give free utterance to the sentiments of gratitude inspired by his character and services, it might seem to transcend the limits which delicacy prescribe. On the other hand, if he omitted to allude to his usefulness in the sublime plan of benevolence to which he had dedicated the powers of his gifted mind, he would feel conscious that he had withheld a tribute which justice demands. More than this, it would be the suppression of a fact of important significance in connection with the history and prospect of the institution. For a series of years Dr. Hervey B. Wilbur has made it the chief object of his life to raise the imbecile from his degradation, and awaken him to a consciousness of his existence, as a moral and intellectual being. He was the founder of a school for the education of idiots, which he established at Barre, Massachusetts, in 1848. In conducting this establishment, his labors were attended with such remarkable success, and he gave such evidences of the peculiar capacity and aptitude which the service requires, that the trustees of our state asylum, while arranging its organization, decided to invite him to take the superintendence of the institution. Fortunately for the state, he yielded to the solicitation of the trustees, and accepted the appointment. The wisdom of their choice is attested by the favorable result of his efforts as exhibited in the onward progress of the school from its commencement in 1851 and in its present gratifying condition. In their last annual report, the trustees justly observe that the great success of the institution is mainly owing to the remarkable qualifications and unremitted services of the superintendent.

Without some experience no man can form an adequate idea of the difficulties to be encountered in the training and management of idiotic children. The task requires an unusual share of patience, perseverance, kindness, tact and judgement. The means to be employed are widely different from the exercises in the ordinary educational system.

[Gov. H. said it had been his intention to present some further views on the nature of the obstacles to be overcome and the benefits to be conferred by idiot education, but he was happily relieved from this part of his task by the presence of one far more competent to

shed light upon the subject. He referred in terms of just acknowledgment to Dr. Seguin, the celebrated philanthropist and teacher, who first reduced the training of imbeciles to a system, in France.]

According to statistical returns, which, if not strictly accurate, are free from exaggeration, it is estimated that the whole number of idiots in this state is about 2800, and of these that about 700 are under fourteen and capable of instruction. The importance of the subject will be more fully realized when we extend our view, and consider the number in the United States. It is a moderate calculation to assume that the country contains 20,000 idiotic persons, of different degrees of imbecility. Of these about 5000 must be suitable subjects for discipline and education. It remains for the American people, through their state legislatures, to determine whether this large class of human beings shall be permitted to remain in their present degraded and painful condition. Or will they adopt prompt and effective measures to raise them to their true position in the scale of being? I trust the response to this appeal will be worthy of the national character for benevolence and humanity.

The erection of this, the first state asylum for idiots, of which the foundation has now been laid, should be regarded not as the consummation, but the commencement of a system to be prosecuted and extended by aiding or founding similiar schools in other sections of the state until all who need shall participate in the blessings of a generous public charity. We may also indulge in the hope that other states will esteem our example fit for imitation, until the wants of every portion of the union shall have been fully supplied.

The foundation of this asylum is an event which will be hailed with joy by many sympathizing hearts. It will carry hope and gladness to many homes from which cheerfulness had been banished by the presence of the idiot child. It will be cherished in grateful memories, as the generous offering of a great and free state upon the altar of our common humanity. To behold a government exerting its ample energies to relieve the afflicted and exalt the lowly, is a spectacle of a high moral sublimity. When the civil power is thus displayed in efforts to elevate and improve the condition of mau, it hears an impress almost divine, and may be regarded without irreverence, as the instrument, if not the representation of Deity.

The following hymn was then sung:

O, spirit of the living God,
In all thy plenitude of grace,
Grant here thine aid to bring to light,
The most benighted of our race.

To those who teach, give hearts of love,
 That they to life the dead may bring;
 Give power and unction from above,
 That here the dumb thy praise may sing.

May darkness here be turned to light—
 Confusion into order changed;
 Souls without strength, inspired with might,
 And idiots with thy children ranged.

The Hon. E. W. Leavenworth, secretary of state, then came forward and remarked that it gave him great pleasure to introduce to the assembly a gentleman, who, as the pupil of Itard and Esquirol, had been early imbued with the combined principles of science and philanthropy—whose name and works, and devotion to the cause, were well known wherever anything was known of the education of idiots; and he would also add, to whom was universally conceded the merit of first developing and establishing the principles which lie at the foundation, and first systematizing the art upon which the education of idiots is based, and by which it is successfully conducted. This gentleman was Dr. Edward Seguin, of France. After the applause had subsided, that his presence had occasioned, and with an apology for his inability to do justice to his own feelings and to the subject, in a language, not his own, Dr. Seguin spoke as follows:

God has scattered among us—rare as the possessors of genius—the idiot, the blind, the deaf mute, in order to bind the rich to the needy, the talented to the incapable, all men to each other, by a tie of indissoluble solidarity. The old bonds are dissolving; man is already unwilling to continue to contribute money or palaces for the support of indolent nobility; but he is every day more ready to build palaces and give annuities for the indigent or infirm—the chosen friends of our Lord Jesus.

See that stone—the token of a new alliance between humanity and a class hitherto neglected—that, ladies and gentleman, is your pride; it is the greatest joy of my life, for I, too, have labored for the poor idiot.

Happy the city which has enriched itself by such a monument.
 Happy the man who has conquered this monument by his indomi-

table courage in instructing idiots. Happy those whom I see around me who have sustained him in this charitable enterprise.

The Hon. A. B. Conger, an early friend and advocate of the institution in the state senate, then addressed the audience in some eloquent remarks. It was his good fortune to be present, through the kindness of friends. He was there as a stranger. He eloquently discoursed upon the beauty of the scenery around him. He would be glad to catch, at a single glance, the whole surrounding country, which but a few years since was roamed over by the Indian, but now is cultivated by civilized man. He would, if he had time, pay a tribute to western New York. He spoke of the asylum of which the citizens had now assembled to lay the corner-stone. He would like to pay a tribute to a Webster, a Geddes, and a Forman, who first commenced the work of progress in this section of the country. The lowering of yonder lake, and placing this region in a condition to build large and prosperous cities, was a masterpiece. Yonder spires, and the presence of this audience, attest the truth of enterprise. Every section of the union was deeply interested in the prosperity of this institution. There were many homes afflicted in his own locality with idiots.

Hon. Christopher Morgan, ex-secretary of state, was then introduced by Mr. Leavenworth. He said that he presumed that Gen. Leavenworth supposed all his predecessors must speak. He had visited Syracuse on several occasions, but none like the present. He had been here at conventions of all kinds, but this was the happiest convention he had ever attended. He spoke of the war in the east. England, France and Turkey were marshaling their allied forces to batter down the walls of Constradt and Sebastopol. The battle fields were to be Macadamized with the bones of slaughtered millions. But how different! The people of Syracuse had assembled to lay the corner-stone of an

institution of benevolence. Was not this far better? He felt proud of his native state, because it was on account of such institutions that it merited the title of the empire state. We live in a land favored above all others on earth. Every where you may see enterprise. Our canals and railroads are living monuments of civilization. Idiots can be instructed mentally as well as physically. Complete this institution, and in a few years you may see the little boy and girl—children of misfortune—with their countenances beaming with intelligence. In conclusion he eloquently called upon our citizens to let no party strife retard their progress in erecting this institution, and invoked them to foster and cherish this act of benevolence, which was for the true, *bona fide know nothings*.

Rev. S. J. May, on being called upon, remarked:

Twenty-five years ago, or more, in the early days of my ministry, I encountered, as every man who thinks at all must, sooner or later encounter, the great problem of the existence of evil—the question, how the good God, the Heavenly Father, could permit his children of earth to be so tempted, tried, and afflicted as they are. I was unable to avoid this perplexing subject; so I met it, as best I could, in full faith, that the wisdom and goodness of God will be justified in all his works, and in all his ways, whenever they shall be fully understood.

I endeavored to lead my audience to see what, in almost every direction, was very apparent to myself, that evil is a means to some higher good; never an end; never permitted for its own sake, certainly not for the sake of vengeance.

I was able easily to trace out the good effects of many evils; to show how they had stimulated mankind to exertion and contrivance, physical and mental; to tell of the discoveries, inventions and improvements that were the consequences. In particular, I dwelt upon the sad privations those individuals are subjected to who were born deaf or blind. The institution of the Asylum for the Deaf and Dumb, at Hartford, was then of recent date, and a school for the blind was said to have been opened in Paris. These institutions were then of great interest to the philanthropic; and I found no difficulty in showing, that the philosophy of mind, and the science and art of education in general, had been much improved by the

earnest and successful endeavors which benevolent persons had made to open communications with the minds and hearts of persons deprived of one or more of the most important senses.

But there was idiocy—idiocy so appalling in its appearance, so hopeless in its nature; what could be the use of such an evil? It were not enough to point to it, as a consequence of the violation of some of the essential laws of generation. If that were all, its end would be punishment. I ventured, therefore, to declare, with an emphasis enhanced somewhat, perhaps, by a lurking distrust of the prediction, that the time would come when access would be found to the idiotic brain; the light of intelligence admitted into its dark chambers, and the whole race be benefited by some new discovery of the nature of mind. It seemed to some of my hearers, more than to myself, a daring conjecture.

Two or three years afterwards I read in the newspaper a brief announcement of the fact, that a Dr. Seguin, of Paris, had succeeded in educating idiots. I flew to her who would be most likely to sympathise in my joy, shouting, "Wife, my prophecy is fulfilled. Idiots have been educated."

And lo! here, to-day, on this platform, I behold the man, the very Dr. Seguin, who more than twenty years ago accomplished that which, until it had been done, it seemed absurd to expect. This excellent philanthropist has recently come to reside in a distant part of our country. Hearing of the occasion which has brought us all to this place to-day, he hied him hither, that he might witness, with his own eyes, the laying of the corner stone of the first building in this country ever dedicated from its foundation to *the instruction of idiots*. If Dr. Seguin is not yet sufficiently familiar with our language to make himself intelligible to you in a speech, I trust he will at least consent to stand up before you, that you may see the man to whom our common humanity owes so much.

He is a French gentleman. And here I must be allowed to pay a tribute of gratitude to that people, to which, by birth, he belongs. It is due to them; and I wish some one was now in my place who could do the subject ample justice. It is due from us. Most of us probably were educated to distrust the French—to esteem them lightly. Our teachers in this matter have been the English—the last people in the world who should be trusted to give us a true estimate of the achievements and character of the French. Whatever may be true of their volatility, it is certain that no people have been so ingeniously, as well as actively and patiently benevolent as the French.

They were the first to attempt some improvements in the discipline of prisons. To them we owe the entire and most benignant change that has taken place in the treatment of the insane. It was a Frenchman who invented the methods by which the deaf and dumb may be instructed in all knowledge that does not come by hearing alone. A Frenchman, too, it was who contrived the instruments and pointed out the means by which the other senses may be made, in a great measure, to supply the want of sight. And to-day we have reason gratefully to acknowledge that Frenchmen were the first to descend into the lowest depth of human wretchedness. They were the first to conceive (and they persevered in their experiments until they proved) that even idiocy is a condition susceptible of improvement—that *idiots can be educated*. And here we have with us, in our very midst, the man—the Frenchman—to whom, under God, the subjects of this terrible malady; their relatives; the communities in which they were born; and our common humanity owe more, perhaps, than to any other individual. He is entitled to an expression of our respect and gratitude. Let the name of Edward Seguin never be forgotten.

Here, too, we have the gentleman, selected by our legislature because of his well known success and his eminent qualifications, to take charge of the novel and inestimable institution established upon this spot. In a few months, Dr. Wilbur, with his family, his assistants and pupils, will come to dwell in the edifice that is to be erected upon these foundations. They are to become our fellow citizens. They are to be, in a great measure, committed by the state to our sympathy and coöperation. Fellow citizens of Syracuse, Onondaga county, central New York! Let us to-day give them every assurance of a hearty welcome, and hereafter show to the people of our great commonwealth, by our intelligent appreciation of the important work to be done within these walls, and our generous aid of those who shall be placed here to do it. Let us show that Syracuse was a well chosen location for the New York State Asylum for Idiots.

Mr. Titus, of New York, in introducing Dr. Backus to the assembly, made the following remarks:

CITIZENS OF SYRACUSE:

There is a name in the history of our state which you will ever delight to honor—I allude to De Witt Clinton. His intelligence comprehended the extent of the rich resources deposited in central New York, and apprehended the embarrassment which prevented

the development of those resources. He saw that the failure on the part of nature to supply a ready navigation was the cause of that embarrassment. His genius devised—his resolution prosecuted—his energy brought into successful operation yonder *artificial river* as a remedy for the great *natural deficiency*; and his name will forever stand identified with the prosperity and riches of your city.

This day you are giving your encouragement and aid to an enterprise devised to remedy the *natural deficiency*, which, heretofore, has operated as a controlling embarrassment in all efforts for the mental development of an unfortunate class of our population. This asylum for idiots is destined to be for its pitiable inmates an artificial channel for moral advancement, as beneficent and enriching as has been the Erie canal for your material prosperity. The munificence and sympathy which you have thus early manifested in behalf of the poor idiot is a warrant that, hereafter, this asylum will occupy in your charitable considerations a position corresponding with that of the canal in your business thoughts.

There is a gentleman present whose name will always stand identified with this humane enterprise in our state as does the name of Clinton with the Erie canal—I allude to Frederick F. Backus. You have just heard in the truthful history of the institution by Dr. Wilbur, and in the eloquent address by Governor Hunt, of his valuable and devoted exertions in the first *public* movement made in America in the cause of the education of idiots. It is, therefore, needless for me to enlarge on that head; but I desire, from my own knowledge, to say that had the bill which Dr. Backus, by his great personal influence and devotion carried through the senate in 1846, been sustained in the the house of assembly by any member with equal personal influence and devotion, an asylum for idiots would have been established by the state of New York in that year. I am unwilling, citizens of Syracuse, that an individual standing thus prominent in the history of this noble charity should be among you on this interesting occasion without allowing you an opportunity of an acquaintance; I shall, therefore, take the liberty of disregarding his desire to remain unobserved, and of claiming the privilege to make him personally known by you.

Mr. Titus then introduced Dr. Backus to the assembly.

Dr. Backus excused himself from speaking on account of his health.

The benediction was then pronounced by the Rev. Mr. Canfield.

The following letters were received from gentlemen who were invited but were unable to attend on this occasion:

New York, Sept. 6, 1854.

My Dear Sir—It would give me great pleasure to be at Syracuse on the occasion of laying the corner stone of the asylum for idiots, but it will not be in my power.

I remember, with much interest, the visit we paid to that institution, in its original location near Albany. I was then deeply impressed with the importance of the undertaking, and highly gratified with the success which seemed already to have crowned your efforts. No object more purely benevolent can engage the attention of Christian men, and call, more generally, for the good wishes of the friends of humanity.

I trust it will continue to receive the fostering care of the legislature.

I am, very truly, yours,

THOS. J. OAKLEY.

To Mr. James H. Titus.

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNORS OF THE ALMS HOUSE, }
Rotunda, Park. }

New York, Sept. 7, 1854.

James H. Titus, Esq.:

Dear Sir—Your note of invitation to Syracuse was not received in time to enable the board of governors to participate in the ceremonies to-morrow. I am sure, however, that I express the feeling of the governors of the alms house when I assure you of the deep interest they feel in the success of the State Asylum for Idiots. I assure you that I remember, with much satisfaction, the visit I made to your institution near Albany.

To one who has observed the condition of the idiot, left to the ordinary treatment of the poor house, it is most gratifying to witness the great advantages a strictly idiot institution has over the ordinary provision made for this unfortunate class.

I must not forget our two boys, Natty and Willie. You, I am sure, remember their condition while under our care at Randall's Island. To see them now under the tuition and care of your institution, almost in full possession of all the ordinary faculties of the mind, taught as ordinary children are, the benefits and comforts of habits of cleanliness and order,—and by means of special treatment and attention made participants in the enjoyments of life, as well as an appreciation of a happy future, calls from us a united expression of

our confidence in the asylum which we trust will meet with the strongest sympathy and aid of legislators as well as our citizens generally.

With great respect,

your ob't serv't,

S. DRAPER, *Pres't.*

Little Falls, Sept. 22, 1854.

Hon. James H. Titus, Saratoga Springs:

My Dear Sir—Your invitation to participate in the ceremonies on the occasion of laying the corner stone of the New York Asylum for Idiots came to my hands too late to enable me to attend with convenience, and I have not sooner acknowledged your courtesy for the reason that from the date of your letter I was at a loss where to address you.

It would have given me much gratification to be present on an occasion of such rare interest as that of founding the first edifice in the United States consecrated to this interesting charity.

The visit I made in 1852, upon your invitation, to the State School for Idiots at Albany, in company with several gentlemen of the senate and assembly, made an impression upon my memory which is often recalled with the freshness and particularity of an event of yesterday. The little *innocents* seemed so happy in possessing the first glimmerings of intellect and knowledge; the expedients resorted to by their teachers in order to excite the curiosity of a vacant mind—to awaken it to the effort of action—to induce attention and consecutive ideas—the progress effected by repeated and often renewed practice and patience of both teachers and pupils—the apparent pleasure which lighted up the vacant countenance of idiocy upon the mastery of a thought or of connecting an idea with its consequent, resulting in the clear manifestation of a human intellect where none apparently existed before, carried one's thoughts back to the fountains of ideas, and produced in my mind emotions and feelings not to be forgotten. It seemed almost like the creation of a human soul. The progress which the pupils had made, step by step, and little by little, from blank idiocy to social humanity, and even to creditable attainments in numerals and in geographical locations, was full of hope and encouragement. I assure you that I regard this institution as a noble and most interesting charity, and I rejoice that its administration has fallen into the hands of men like yourself and Dr. Wilbur. He is entitled to great credit, not more, however, for the judicious skill of his discipline than for the untiring zeal and

benevolence with which he pursues his purpose in benefiting these unfortunate beings. Permit me to acknowledge to him, through you, his note of invitation of the same purport as yours, but not received by me until after the ceremony was past.

With thanks for your polite attention and kind remembrance, and with my best wishes for the success of the benevolent enterprise in which you are engaged,

I remain, dear sir,

with sincere regard,

yours, &c.,

ARPHAXED LOOMIS.

Albany, Sept. 6, 1854.

Hon. Franklin Townsend:

Dear Sir—I found your kind invitation on my return to town. It would give me great pleasure to join in celebrating this auspicious event, but my business prevents.

Truly yours,

T. R. BECK.

My Dear Sir—It would afford me an especial pleasure to comply with the obliging invitation of your circular and be present on the very interesting occasion of laying the corner stone of “the first building erected in the United States for the education of idiots;” but I much regret to find that I must forego this pleasure on account of indispensable engagements at home.

Be assured, my dear sir, my heart is with you in your most praiseworthy benevolent enterprise, with my prayers that He who, although infinite in power and occupied in the great affairs of creating and governing worlds—in training and instructing *archangels*, and communing with the high and bright mature intelligences of the upper worlds, yet condescends to regard with tender care the *safety* of *sparrows*, the *feeding* of *lambs*, the *clothing* of *lilies*—and has taught us not “to despise *the day of small things*,” but in the progress of developments to observe “first the blade, then the ear, and *after that* the full corn in the ear”—that He may be with you to bless and establish you firmly in the foundation of your building and in the principles and measures of your institution, in developing and training physical, mental and moral powers, which, though for the present incidentally weak and small, have nevertheless been created not in vain.

Let our motto be, in the words of Him who came "to seek and to save that which was lost," "*Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost,*"—believing that from among these fragments there may be gathered some of "*the last*" which shall finally be found among "*the first.*"

Yours truly,

D. E. BARTLETT.

Family School for Little Deaf Mutes, }
Poughkeepsie, N. Y., Sept. 2, 1854. }

Albany, Sept. 7, 1854.

H. B. Wilbur, Esq.:

Dear Sir—Laying the corner stone of an asylum for idiots is an event of no ordinary importance in the annals of our noble state, and it would be at once my pride and pleasure, as a philanthropist and Christian, to be present and share in the interesting ceremonies connected with it. But my engagements will not permit me to leave home just now, and therefore, while I gratefully acknowledge the honor conferred by your invitation, I am obliged, reluctantly, to decline it. With assurances of esteem for yourself and associates,

I am, dear sir,

yours truly,

H. MANDEVILLE.

Saratoga Springs, August 25, 1854.

My Dear Sir—I am very grateful to the trustees of the State Asylum for Idiots for the courtesy they show me by inviting me to attend the ceremony of laying the corner stone of their edifice. My engagements here cover the day when that ceremony will take place, and if they shall prove flexible enough to allow of my absence from this place, I have absolute need of the time in attending to private cases long neglected. Nevertheless, I beg the trustees to be assured that I look upon the enterprise, in which the state has engaged their services, as one of the noblest and purest of the many public charities for which she is so justly distinguished.

I am, dear sir,

with great respect and esteem,

your friend and humble servant,

WILLIAM H. SEWARD.

The Honorable Elias W. Leavenworth, Secretary of State.

Boston, Sept. 5, 1854.

My Dear Sir—I regret that I can not be with you on the 8th. Public meetings have become one of the most powerful moral agencies of our day; they are, however, so frequently perverted to selfish purposes, and so generally intended to advance mere material interests, that it would be refreshing indeed to attend yours which is to be simply and purely one of humanity. That is a beautiful form of charity which lightens the infirmity and lessens the suffering of those who can make no return except of gratitude; but that is more beautiful which descends upon those who can never know the benefits they receive, or the benefactors who confer them.

The institution whose foundation stone is to be laid on Friday will be like a last link in a chain—it will complete the circle of the state's charities, which will then embrace every class whose infirmities call for public aid. It has long included the deaf mutes, the blind and the insane, and it is now to include the idiots—a class far, far more deplorably afflicted than either of the others.

The ceremony will be fleeting and soon forgotten; the building itself will, in time, decay, but the institution will last while the state lasts; for when the people once recognize the claim of any class of unfortunates, there is no fear of their ever repudiating the debt of charity. The bonds lie deep in the heart of humanity, as the foundation stone you now lay, lies deep in the bosom of the earth.

Faithfully yours,
S. G. HOWE.

Providence, Sept. 11, 1854.

My Dear Sir—I thank you for your kind invitation to attend the ceremonies at Syracuse. I am, however, deprived of this pleasure for two very satisfactory reasons. First, I did not receive the invitation until this evening; and second, the occasion occurred on commencement week, when I must, by necessity, be at home. My interest is however no less in the noble charity which you so ably superintend. I shall follow your future progress with increasing interest, and rejoice ever in your success.

I am, my dear sir,
yours, very truly,
T. WAYLAND.

H. B. Wilbur, M. D.

APPENDIX.

I have thought it desirable to append a note, to substantiate the assertions made in one of the reports of our asylum, and repeated in this address, relative to the labors of Dr. Backus, as a different impression has been conveyed through some of the public journals, growing out of the fact that similar efforts were made in the Massachusetts legislature during the session of 1846.

The points that I wish to establish are, 1st. That the attempts at legislation in behalf of idiots in New York preceded the similar attempts in Massachusetts. 2d. That the impulse of Dr. Backus' labors for that object was absolutely felt in the succeeding Massachusetts legislation.

As to the former, I remark, that on the 13th of January, 1846, Dr. Backus moved a reference of that portion of the census relating to idiots to the committee on medical societies, of which he was chairman. The next day (January 15th) he read a long and able report (senate doc. No. 23) upon the subject, the materials for which had been collected before the commencement of the session. It argued the great necessity of an institution for idiots, from the large number and miserable condition of that class in the state of New York; from the opinions of those most likely to be familiar with the subject, of the probable good results of

such an institution, and especially from the actual success of similar institutions in Europe.

After thus breaking ground upon the subject and calling the attention of the members to a cause so novel, on the 25th of March he introduced a bill making an appropriation for the purchase of a site and the erection of buildings for an asylum for idiots. This was placing it at once upon the same footing with the other state charitable institutions. The further history of the legislation is given in the body of the address.

On the other hand, in Massachusetts, it was not till the 22d of January, 1846, that an order was adopted by the house, on the motion of Judge Byington, for the appointment of a committee to consider the expediency of appointing "commissioners on idiocy." On the 26th of March, Judge B., for the committee, reported a resolve for the appointment of such commissioners; and on the 15th of May they were appointed. That commission made a partial report in 1847, and a final one in 1848. Then and not till then, was a bill introduced for the establishment of an experimental school for three years.

As to the latter point, that the impulse of Dr. Backus' labors was felt in the succeeding Massachusetts legislation, I submit: That on his election to the New York senate, he immediately commenced collecting the materials for a report upon this very subject. Among the individuals whom he consulted by letter, and whose opinions he thought would add weight to his statements and recommendation, was the late Dr. Woodward, of Massachusetts. His reply was embodied in that report. I give the following extract from it: "It is quite time for public provision to be made for them in this country, and the empire state should and may easily set the example." Now this mode of expression would indicate that he had not then proposed to attempt the same thing, simultaneously in Massachusetts.

But to those who had the pleasure of knowing him, it will be readily understood how a suggestion so philanthropic in its character would result in a prompt and hearty effort for the same object in a state with whose public charities he had always been identified.

I had it from the lips of Dr. Woodward that he was prompted to originate the movement in the Massachusetts legislature by this correspondence with Dr. Backus.

That he did originate it there, will be seen by an extract from a letter I have received from Judge Byington:—"Dr. Woodward's first suggestion to me, in relation to making an effort to improve the condition of idiots was by letter. I had occasion to write to him soon after I went to Boston, in January, 1846. In his reply to me (relating to another subject), he briefly called my attention to the subject. I immediately after introduced an order for the appointment of a committee and one was appointed that resulted in the appointment of commissioners."

It should however be mentioned, as showing how in some measure this new form of charity, that had been so long needed, began to be felt as a want in the public mind in this country, that the attention of gentleman connected with the previously existing charitable institutions, had been drawn to this subject to some extent and an impulse had from them been imparted to the community.

Thus in Massachusetts for example, to quote from the report of Dr. S. G. Howe, on the "training and teaching of idiots," made in February, 1850, "There had been also several cases where blindness was accompanied with feebleness of intellect approaching to idiocy; and the degree of success which had crowned the effort to instruct the sufferers, gave a portion of the knowledge and faith necessary, to those who would have the management of the new experiment."

That these cases, thus alluded to, had not received a

special education as idiots, is evident, from the language of the same report on a previous page:—"It may be well, in this first report, to put upon record, a brief history of this interesting movement in behalf of a class of unfortunate creatures, who have hitherto been thought to be beyond the reach even of the most earnest hand of charity.

"In the winter of 1845-6, several gentlemen became interested in the sad condition of the idiots in the state, and, without any precise knowledge of what had been done for such persons elsewhere, or what could be done, determined that a fair trial should be made of the capacity of this unhappy class for improvement. The state had most readily and generously seconded the efforts of humane men for the relief of the insane, the deaf mutes, and the blind; and made ample provision for their care and instruction. While, like a wise parent, she left all her other children to wholesome liberty, and strengthening self control, she gathered these feeble ones under the wings of her motherly love, and nursed and nurtured them with unsparing pains and care. Nothing had been done for the most wretched and helpless of all,—the idiots, but this was only because their case seemed hopeless."

Those connected with the deaf and dumb asylums of the country, had been especially awakened to the importance of the subject. They were not uncommonly receiving pupils of this character, because muteness is so common a symptom in idiocy. I am aware of only a few cases that were retained and partially educated even at these institutions.

A boy was received at the New York institution in 1839, and retained for the space of three years, under the instruction of Prof. Morris, with quite favorable results.

In the American Annals for the Deaf and Dumb, January, 1848, will be found an article by Prof. Turner, in which two or three cases are described, that had been under in-

struction for longer or shorter periods, at the American Asylum at Hartford, Conn.

A brief account of some of the European schools was given also, in the reports of the American asylums, which are extensively distributed.

It only remains to append a list of the American institutions for the education of idiots, in the order in which they were opened.

A private institution at Barre, Massachusetts, that was established by Dr. H. B. Wilbur in July, 1848. This is now in successful operation under the management of Dr. George Brown.

The Massachusetts Experimental School, at South Boston, commenced in October, 1848. Dr. S. G. Howe, superintendent.

The New York State Asylum, at Albany, opened in October, 1851. Dr. H. B. Wilbur, superintendent.

A private institution opened in the winter of 1852, at Germantown, Penn., by Mr. J. B. Richards, who was connected with the Massachusetts State School, as instructor, from its commencement. This is now merged in the Pennsylvania State Institution, founded in 1853. Mr. J. B. Richards, superintendent.

EXPLANATION

OF THE FOLLOWING PLANS.

SUB-CELLAR.

- A, A, A, A, A, A—Furnace Room.
 B, B—Passage.
 C—Coal Cellar.

BASEMENT.

- A—Entrance.
 B, B—Halls.
 C—Kitchen.
 D, D, D, D—Girls' and Boys' Dining Rooms.
 E, E—Washing Rooms.
 F, F—Girls and Boys' Bathing Room.
 G—Superintendent's Dining Room.
 H—House Dining Room.
 I—Servants' Hall.
 J—Ironing Room.
 K—Cellar.
 L, L—Store Rooms.
 M—Private Stairs.
 N—Kitchen Pantry.
 O—Dining Room Pantry.
 P—Superintendent's Dining Room Pantry.
 Q, Q—Passage.
 R, R, R, R, R—Water Closets.

PRINCIPAL STORY.

- A—Entrance.
 B—Main Stairs.
 C—Centre School Room.
 D—Girls' School Room.
 E—Boys' School Room.
 F—Superintendent's Parlor.
 G—Office.
 H, H—Day Rooms for Children.
 J, K—Nurseries for Girls and Boys.
 L—Matron's Room.
 M—Steward's Room.
 O—Superintendents' Study.
 P—Teachers' Sitting Room.
 Q, Q—Piazzas.

- R—Portico.
 S, S—Corridors.
 T—Porch.
 V—Private Stairs.
 X, X—Water Closets.

SECOND STORY.

- A—Sitting Room.
 B—Main Stairs.
 C, C, C, C—Dormitories for Boys.
 D, D, D—Dormitories for Girls.
 E, E—Attendants' Rooms. Wardrobes.
 F, F—Superintendent's Bed Rooms.
 G, G—Teachers' Bed Rooms.
 H, H—Corridors.
 I—Private Stairs.
 J, J—Boys' and Girls' Bathing Rooms.
 K, K—Closets.
 L—Superintendent's Bath Room.
 M, M—Piazzas.
 N, N—Water Closets.

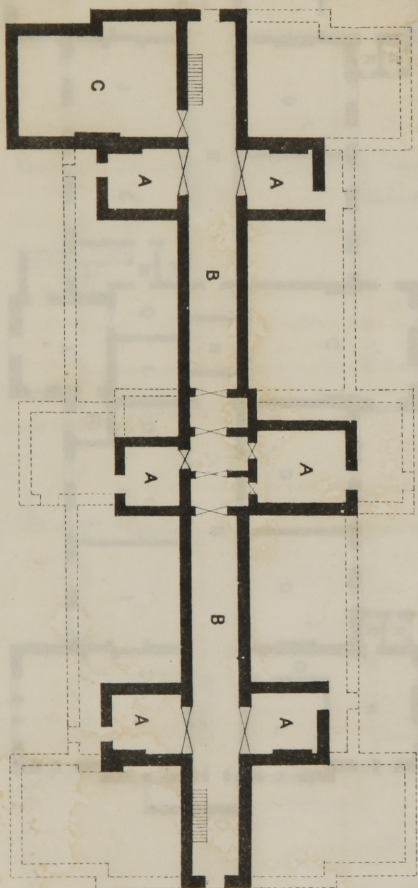
THIRD STORY.

- A—Museum.
 B—Main Stairs.
 C—Stairs to Observatory.
 D, D, D, D—Boys' Dormitories.
 E, E, E—Girls' Dormitories.
 F, F—Attendants' Rooms. Wardrobes.
 G, G—Bed Rooms.
 H—Private Stairs.
 I, I, I—Teachers' Bed Rooms.
 J, J—Closets.
 K, K—Passages.
 L, L—Corridors.

FOURTH STORY.

- A—Observatory.
 B—Sky Light.
 C, C—Girls' Dormitories.
 D, D—Boys' Dormitories.

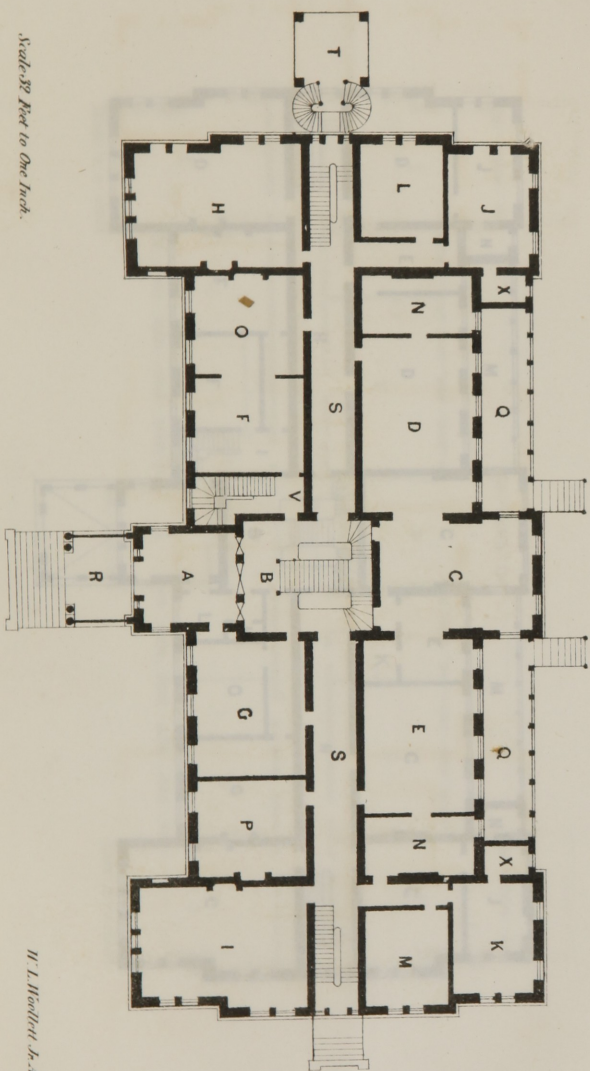
The view of the building given was drawn from a daguerreotype that was quite indistinct. Great justice is by that means done to the grounds about the building.



SUB CELLAR

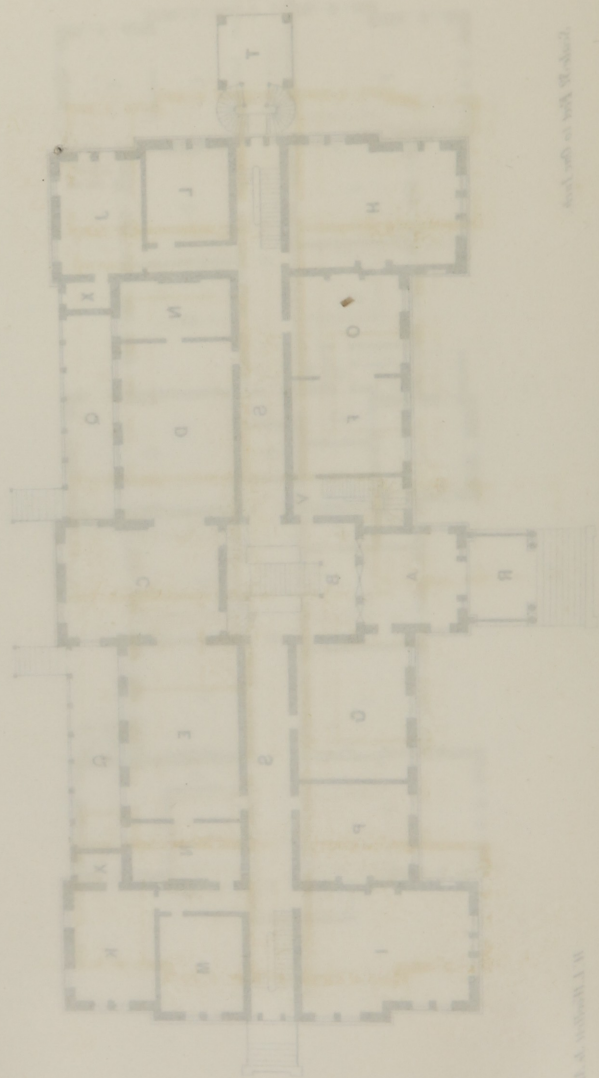


PLAN OF BASEMENT

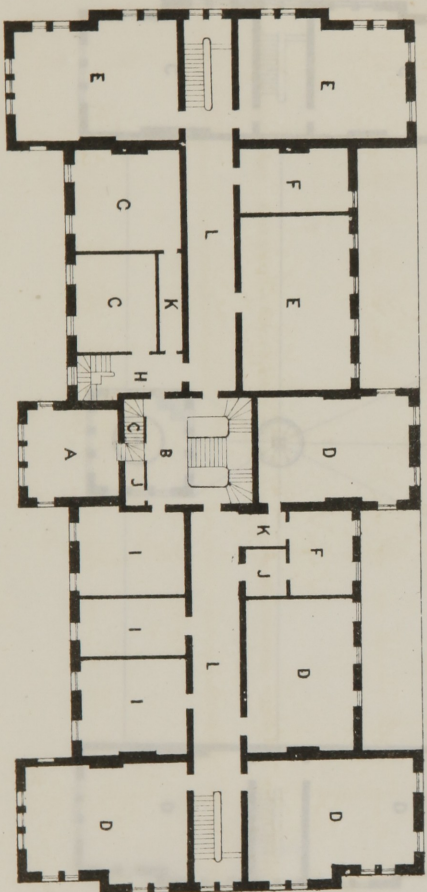


Scale 32 Feet to One Inch.

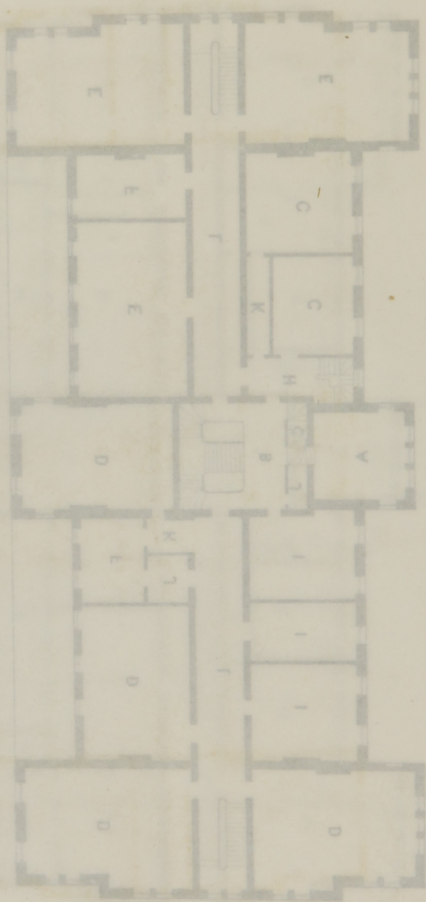
H. L. Weston Jr. Architect.

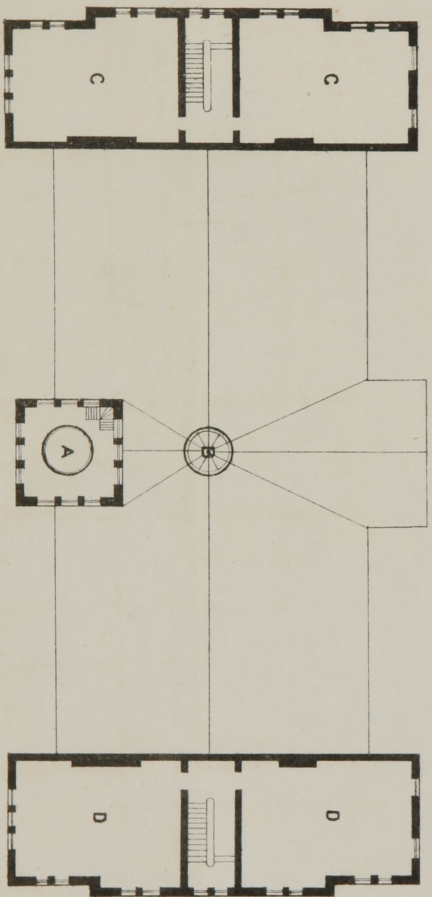






THIRD STORY





FOURTH STORY

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